

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 486

SP 016 960

AUTHOR Fasenmeyer, Mary Sarah
 TITLE learning and Authority.
 PUB DATE Jan 80
 NOTE 14p.: Prepared for Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education "Needs of Elementary and Secondary Education in the 1980's: A Compendium of Policy Papers." For entire document (microfiche only), see ED 185 660. For individual documents (microfiche and paper copy), see SP 016 934.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education: Ethical Instruction: *Mastery Learning: *Minimum Competencies: *Power Structure: Reading Achievement: Reading Centers: Student Promotion: *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

The decay in the quality of education is due to a breakdown in authority the schools have over students and educational processes. Emphasis must be placed on the school's power to determine minimum competencies through periodic evaluation, and, if necessary, to prescribe remedial education or grade repetition. Schools should have special reading clinics for students who experience difficulties in attaining minimum reading skills. In addition to emphasis on reading, writing, speaking, and computational skills, the school should take care to inculcate a sense of social and moral responsibility in its students. This responsibility includes respect for life, property, and integrity. To facilitate moral education in public schools, new preservice and inservice programs must be developed. (RJG)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

LEARNING AND AUTHORITY

Part I

The public attitude toward low achievement in the elementary and secondary schools has shifted from a belief that national origins, poverty, religious beliefs, and over-crowded homes result in low achievement to a strong position which assigns causality directly to the schools, the teachers, and the teaching content and methodologies being employed (Dunn and Dunn, 1978). The demand for accountability has indicated to the public that schools must produce literate, educated persons and that the taxpaying citizenry has a right to expect such a return on tax investments. Accountability is placed squarely on the schools and their personnel, and court actions of recent years have tended to support this contention.

Symptoms of educational decay are rampant. The public is constantly reminded of the high dropout rate, the functional illiterates who receive high school diplomas, the number of police required to maintain the security of schools, the grade inflation, and the list goes on. The malaise appears to be so widespread that serious educators are fearful that it can never be corrected. The entrenched bureaucracies which set policy seem so sluggish as to be unable to recognize the problems and totally incapable of remediating their own systems.

Actually, the symptoms of educational breakdown are manifestations of a deeper malady and that is the breakdown of authority relations in education. Copperman states:

ED194486

SP 016960

Virtually every significant educational problem of the past decade results directly from the abrogation or subversion of normal educational authority. The authority relationship bonding teacher to student makes the educational process work. A number of societal forces have subverted the normal exercise of educational authority over the past ten years, causing a degeneration of the educational process (Copperman, 1978).

Copperman is not alone in his assessment of the decay of authority in the schools. Dornbusch's research relative to the low academic achievement of Chicano high school students supports the same phenomenon (Fernandez, Espinosa, and Dornbusch, 1975).

Dr. Diana Baumrind, a noted expert on child development, speaks to the problem of authority and the adolescent:

Adolescence is the time of life for the individual to come to terms with the reality principle. The universal experiences of loneliness, fear of failure, and insufficiency must be faced: they cannot be blocked indefinitely with drugs, sex, or for that matter, obsessive involvement in work. The adolescent must learn (if he ever is going to learn) how to tolerate delay, control rage and sexual desire, sublimate, think rationally, act responsibly, endure suffering, adjust to that which cannot be altered and serve the community. Because young persons today believe that they have or should have more options than they do, it is more difficult for them than it should be to endure situational and social imperfections. They feel as though conditions which they do not like are intolerable. They demand meaning, as though one generation can deliver meaning to another on a silver platter (Baumrind, 1968).

The generalization that the breakdown of the authority of the school is widespread must be taken seriously. No perceptive educator can take issue with this fact. And when the authority relationship has deteriorated the school cannot perform its stated function; the exceptional schools where good learning takes place are those which have maintained a proper authority balance among administrators, teachers and students.

Furthermore, school authority is weakened by reason of the widespread and historical antipathy to authority which permeates American society. This nation was born in rebellion to the misuse of authority; a fear of authoritarian abuse has become a core part of the American heritage. Young people are imbued with a certain distrust of authority: nevertheless, the problems of schooling will not be solved until normal authority relations are reinstituted in the American educational system.

The function of the school is not to serve as an authoritarian institution with the limitations implied in authoritarianism. Rather the school is authoritative, with the relationship of teacher to student as the core authority concept. The adult with mature skills exercises his natural authority in the schooling process as he transmits knowledge and skills to the young. Copperman maintains that it is the function of the school to give its learners the freedom to function in the world which comes as a result of an adequate education. He contends that "it is the function of educators to train young people to become autonomously functioning adults. Autonomy is not something that can be given. Autonomy must be acquired" (Copperman, 1978).

There is ample evidence that school systems have renounced their authority and hence their responsibility to students. The critical question to be answered asks: What is being done to remedy the situation? Must teachers, administrators and parents despair of upgrading their schools?

A host of variables need to be considered in order to document the course of action for correcting the appalling conditions

in the schools. Philip Jackson refers to the fact that public school classrooms are characterized by "crowds" and "power" relationships (Jackson, 1968). Is it possible to restore authority in structures where so many people spend such long hours in close physical contact with so little privacy or freedom to pursue personal interests and goals?

Managing successfully the authority relationships in the complex institutions called schools must be the highest priority for all principals and teachers. It may be convenient and self-serving to fix blame on the bureaucracy, the School Board, the community. Actually, the strong principal with a well-motivated faculty can and must restore the authority relationship within the school. This does not imply that schools become overbearing, tyrannical or oppressive. Rather it suggests most emphatically that authority is necessary in any organization, including businesses, firms and human service agencies. The school is no exception and the behaviors of students, concurrent to their maturation levels, should be as responsible and controlled as those of the clients or participants in any other functioning organization.

Part II

The proper authority relationship in the schools can be restored when faculty and administration are willing to set standards and adhere to such standards. There is a body of knowledge and a basic set of skills which need to be transmitted to the young if they

are to have the minimum of survival skills for coping in a complex society. Teachers know what skills need to be taught, and they are accountable for upholding the standards of learning in the schooling process.

Upholding standards means that mastery learning is the norm or expectation which must be met. The concept of mastery learning is particularly noted at the skills level. All students must learn to read, to write, to express themselves well, and to compute. It is the task of the school to transmit these skills to all its students; unfortunately many pupils go through years of schooling without mastering the most rudimentary of skills acquisition.

Schools and teachers will recognize that skill transmission does not occur in the same way with all children. Research on learning is on-going. However, the level of sophistication in an understanding of learning theory is high. Schools can and should pursue the different modes of knowing and learning. New approaches to learning styles, now receiving wide attention through the work of a number of prominent researchers (Dunn and Dunn, 1978; Farr, 1971), should be fostered and developed. Recognizing that children learn in a variety of ways challenges teachers to explore new methodologies and procedures, but it does not substitute for the maintenance of standards.

There must occur checkpoints in the system when children's achievement is monitored and, if necessary, remediated in depth. The present administrative grouping structure is completely outmoded; the usual practice of promoting children to another grade, irrespective

of achievement, is destructive and self-defeating. Rather, careful assessment is made at least twice per semester. When it becomes obvious that a child is not reading as he should, an alternative remediation must be provided immediately.

Given the low level of reading skills in many American schools, it is a necessity in many cases that reading clinics be established in each building. The child assigned to the reading clinic would spend at least one-half day under the tutelage of master clinicians with special training in the teaching of reading. The establishment of such clinics should be a high priority for educational funding, both at the Federal and state levels. It is necessary that a great deal of additional emphasis be placed on the transmission of reading skills, and the establishment of the reading clinics seems to be a necessity at this point.

The school needs to evaluate the accomplishment of its learners and confer carefully with parents as each checkpoint is reached. Not all children will require a placement in the reading clinic, but the school must inform the parents when such a need exists. Furthermore, the school can and will elicit the support and cooperation of the parents when such remediation is required. The school which is committed to maintaining its standards will provide the concentrated remediation needed for basic skill development. There are few children who cannot master the basic skills. It is up to the school to recognize problems very early and to provide the specialized services early in the schooling process. To simply advance children through a system of "grades," irrespective of mastery, is to eliminate standards, and to abrogate the authority of the school to achieve the goals which it has set for itself.

The problem of reading achievement appears at present to be the most serious in terms of skills development. Reading gains will inevitably lead to gains in writing and speaking. However, the mastery of writing, speaking and computational skills also must be treated within the framework of mastery. There must be learning centers, or specialized teachers, which provide a concentrated remediation experience until children have mastered basic skills and learning. Such schooling patterns may and probably will demand a rethinking of the structures by which education is delivered. Each school must so structure itself and utilize its resources to assure each child reaching his maximal achievement levels.

Not only must the school establish and maintain standards in order to restore its authority, it must also take seriously its role in developing the person of the learner. The whole matter of education for responsibility in living has come up for considerable discussion, and the literature is replete with theories and treatises in the area of moral education. It is totally unrealistic to assume that a school is "value-free" in its orientation. Any school which is willing to impose standards has already assumed a certain set of values which will impact on the person of the learner. Nor is the debate concerning church and state a relevant issue. The entire American system is based on the assumption that citizens will be moral and hold to traditional values. The study of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution confirms the values expectations of the Founding Fathers. A statement by the National Education Association issued in 1951 (Appendix A) states

clearly the role of the public school in moral or character education.

Gustafson describes the outcomes of moral education in this way:

The practical interest in moral education . . . is to make possible the development of persons who are capable of responsible moral action. We want them to accept their moral autonomy and to exercise their capacities to be agents in the on-going processes of human interaction. We want them to accept moral accountability for what they do and to accept responsibility for others: for persons to whom they are significantly related and for the course of events and the states of affairs of which they are part (Gustafson, 1970).

At a very high price courts are maintained and law enforcement agencies are established to assure the basic constitutional rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Citizens are expected to meet societal expectations which safeguard these rights. It should be clear that schools play a major role in developing persons who are willing to respect the rights of each American citizen as well as respect their own participation in a democratic society. It is hardly unconstitutional to inculcate basic respect for life, for property, for integrity. Young people must be made aware that the democracy functions well only when citizens are respectful of and observant of the values system which has been inculcated in our basic documents which bind us as a nation.

The theory and methodology of valuing has been developed considerably by the work of recent researchers. Schools must train the teachers to a new understanding of the valuing process. Values clarification technique has received considerable attention through the publications of Rath, Simon et al. Lawrence Kohlberg has developed a sophisticated model which lends itself well to classroom use. All of these educators have developed materials and curriculum which can

readily be adapted to classroom use. However, the issue is a vital one and a major one. If a school is to accept its role in values or character education, considerable planning and in-service training is needed. The approach to be followed is a pervasive one rather than a new layering on the present curriculum.

Few teachers are adequately prepared in values education, in spite of the plethora of writing in the field. A serious effort to remedy this situation should have a high priority in the planning office of every school or school district.

Education in this country will be vastly improved when the schools spell out their objectives and recognize their authority and accountability to see that these are achieved. There should be no turning back, nor tolerance for lack of achievement. If standards for academic performance are maintained, and if the person of the learner is required to grow and assume personal responsibility, schools will more than justify the faith and support of the American public.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baumrind, D. "Authoritarian vs. Authoritative Parental Control." Adolescence, 1968, 3, p. 269.
- Copperman, Paul. The Literacy Hoax. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1978, p. 148.
- Dunn, Rita, and Kenneth Dunn. Teaching Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles: A Practical Approach. Reston, Virginia: Reston Publishing Co., 1978, p. 1.
- Farr, Beatrice. Individual Differences in Learning: Predicting One's More Effective Learning Modality. (Ph. D. Dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1971.) Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms.
- Fernandez, C., R. Espinosa, and S. Dornbusch. Factors Perpetuating the Low Academic Status of Chicano High School Students. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, July, 1975.
- Grim, P., L. Kohlberg, and S. White. Some relationships between conscience and attentional processes. Journal of personality and social psychology. 1968, 8, 239-252.
- Gustafson, Janier M. "Education for Moral Responsibility," in Moral Education, Theodore Sezer (ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970, p. 14.
- Raths, Louis E., Merrill Harrman, and Sidney B. Simon. Values and Teaching. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1966.
- Simon, Sidney, and Howard Kirschenbaum. Readings in Values Clarification. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Winston Press, 1973.
- Simon, Sidney B., et al. Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies. New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1972.

APPENDIX A

Educational Policies Commission, National Education Association. Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools. Washington, D.C.: NEA, 1951.

Values: moral and spiritual (pages 18-30)

1. Human Personality--The Basic Value

Among the values here proposed, the first is fundamental to all that follow. The basic moral and spiritual value in American life is the supreme importance of the individual personality.

The inherent worth of every human being is basic in the teachings of Christianity and of many other great religions. The individual personality can acquire a capacity for moral judgments and a sense of moral responsibility.

2. Moral Responsibility

If the individual personality is supreme, each person should feel responsible for the consequences of his own conduct.

Moral responsibility and self-discipline are marks of maturity.

3. Institutions as the Servants of Men

If the individual personality is supreme, institutional arrangements are the servants of mankind. Institutions justify their existence as they contribute to the growth, happiness and well-being of individuals.

4. Common Consent

If the individual personality is supreme, mutual consent is better than violence.

Voluntary cooperation, contrary to the idea of survival of the fittest, is essential to all forms of life. According to the American system of values, no partisan interest is authorized to overreach the popular will.

5. Devotion to Truth

If the individual personality is supreme, the human mind should be liberated by access to information and opinion.

Custom and complacency have deprived us of a sharp awareness of the morality of intellectual freedom. Yet, in terms of human history, the rights of a man to speak his mind, to worship according to conscience and training, and to have access to knowledge and divergent opinions are recent achievements.

6. Respect for Excellence

If the individual personality is supreme, excellence in mind, character, and creative ability should be fostered.

Every man is entitled to equal rights before the civil law; every man

should be governed equally by moral standards.

7. Moral Equality

If the individual personality is supreme, all persons should be judged by the same moral standards.

8. Brotherhood

If the individual personality is supreme, the concept of brotherhood should take precedence over selfish interests.

We seek to develop a self-reliant and industrious body of citizens, each of whom will earnestly strive to provide through his own efforts for the comfort and well-being of himself and those dependent upon him. Nevertheless, the care of those among us who may be prevented from doing this, is an inescapable moral responsibility of all citizens.

9. Pursuit of Happiness

If the individual personality is supreme, each person should have the greatest possible opportunity for the pursuit of happiness, provided only that such activities do not substantially interfere with the similar opportunities of others.

10. Spiritual Enrichment

If the individual personality is supreme, each person should be offered the emotional and spiritual experiences which transcend the materialistic aspects of life.

Moral values have consequences chiefly in social relationships. Spiritual values, however, take effect mainly in terms of inner emotions and sentiments.

CHAPTER III---Sanctions (pp. 37-48)

Although the moral and spiritual values in the preceding chapter are accepted by most Americans, wide differences of opinion exist with reference to their sanctions: that is, with reference to the reasons which people give for approving them.

Most Americans find the ultimate sanctions for their system of values in religious convictions.

Other Americans sanction their values chiefly in historical terms. They feel that values can be justified by their demonstrated success in promoting happiness through efficient social and political arrangements.

A great many other people have no clear ideas whatever as to sanctions; they accept values as they find them and conform passively to social pressures.

On neither pedagogical nor on ideological grounds can the schools ignore the problem of sanctions.

Sanctions:

- Justice
- Law
- Property Rights
- Integrity
- Group Approval
- Authority
- Guidance
- Religious beliefs

Sanctions Should Be Carefully Selected

In whatever manner we measure effectiveness, certain criteria may well be followed in using sanctions to teach moral and spiritual values.

In the first place, the sanctions used should not tend in any way to bring the constructive moral or religious teaching of the home into contempt or disrepute. A good teacher will not shrug aside the religious convictions of children and their parents as being unimportant or "unscientific."

Again, the choice of sanctions should involve the largest possible freedom for the child's reason. Other things being equal, the more responsible self-determination and judgment that can be brought to bear on a moral situation the better. It follows that the sanctions used should be adapted to the maturity of the child.

Finally it would seem wise as a rule to utilize a variety of sanctions so that the case for the desired kind of conduct will not depend upon sheer authority alone, or even on the guided judgment of the child alone, or upon any one of the other possible sanctions but rather will call upon a variety of reasons and motives for approved conduct.

Conclusion

The Commission believes that moral and spiritual values can be actively promoted in the public schools by:

1. Defining as goals the accepted moral and spiritual values in our society.
2. Encouraging and helping the individual teacher.
3. Giving attention to moral and spiritual values in teacher education.
4. Teaching these moral and spiritual values at every opportunity.
5. Utilizing all of the school's resources.
6. Devoting sufficient time and staff to wholesome personal relationships.
7. Assuming an attitude of friendly sympathy toward the religious beliefs and practices of students.
8. Promoting religious tolerance actively.
9. Teaching about religion as an important fact in our culture.